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AS220
PSYCHE DETECTIVE

PETER JOHN BOYLE

Pre-Wuise Edition

**SHAWN WALLACE:
BARTLEBY
2003**

"Herman Melville wrote BARTLEBY THE SCRIVENER at a time when his career seemed to be in ruins". At least that's what my encyclopedia of literature sez. And, it goes on to state "thus it reflects his pessimism". But, when I read it, in the summer of 1996, I did not find pessimism, but rather, I felt positively enlightened! Finally, I felt I'd grasped the first credible (albeit absurd) rationale for the randomly maladaptive, inhumane behavior and bizarre editorial capriciousness which characterizes AS220's penultimate technocrat, Shawn Wallace.

I began reading everything I could of Melville that year (which wunt much more than Billy Budd,

Bartleby and Wellingborough Redburn) at a point when my own dubious yet relentless cognition was in complete disarray, as the result of an extremely unusual assortment of psychic insults. And, I suppose you could say that my own laffable "career" appeared to be in ruins as well. (insert cliché)

Yet, despite the fact that a huge majority of those psychic slings n arrows originated in the bureaucratic hell reigned over by AS220's cyber nazi in residence, I found in "Bartleby", to my very great surprise, the first positive glimmer of humanity, and subsequently, the first hypothetical blossom of a genuine psyche inside one of AS220's most peculiar and ego-driven personas. (insert cliché)

Generated partly out of his own predilection, n partly from the absurd pretentiousness that AS220 has always granted its devotees (a simultaneous empowerment n self-negating slack) Shawn Wallace has proceeded from clueless, collegiate dilettante to a pseudo-inscrutable-faux-corporate-managerial-infestation at AS220. But, the really incredible fact is, that he has, over the 13 years of his association with The Beatnik League, become a considerable asset to the commune, partly due to happy accident and partly just dumb luck. (But he'd prolly "prefer" if I just called it a random event.)
(insert cliché)

Ok, now before I get too lost in all the convolutions of Shawn's dubious gray matter, or imitating his pseudo "style" of literary/artistical "sabotage", I wanna git back to Bartleby for a minute, to increase the chances that you will grasp my metaphor more elegantly n instantaneously. If you aint already.
(insert cliché)

The scrivener (or copyist), as the character is portrayed by Melville, is employed originally by a successful Wall Street lawyer in 19th century Manhattan, merely to copy contracts word for word, accurately and without judgement. The "ACTION", so to speak, in this story, begins at the very moment his employer requests that he proofread a document: Essentially raising the level of Bartlebys assigned task from rote imitation to attending to the actual content of what he is copying.

(insert cliché)

This is probably the greatest thematic monument erected within the creative genius of Melville, this side o MOBY DICK! If such a thang is even possible fer us humane beans kickin it wit da quick in the POST LED ZEPPELIN era. And, if that thar epiphany aint proof of a psychic jardin in the mind of Shawn Wallace....

then IM IZ more DAZED N CONFUSED
than is generally construed
in AS220's administrative Strawberry field;
n NOTHING IZ REAL.

(no cliché required)

BACK TO BARLEBY , puh leese.

This metaphorical/thematic NOTHING is so real it REPRESENTS the infinite possibility inherent in the simplest evocation of divine LOGOS, as opposed to the inert, absurd, obdurate void of mere words etched in stone.

(ibid)

N If IM AINT too turribly delusional today, its message is that READIN' N WRITING IZ AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT THANG FROM COMPREHENDING! If it weren't, then watching the head of AS220 n the chairman of its board of directors "perform" their rendition of

Dante's Inferno would be tantamount to grasping every nuance of the Divine Comedy.
(obsit)

Alrighty then, lets get back to the story.

Ask a copyist to assume the responsibility for the coherency or content of the document he is reproducing, letter by letter, and you have essentially suggested that a waitress, with plates stacked on both arms, could possibly carry a jug o water on her head as well! They iz both gonna become quite irascible n disgruntled, to say the least. But, where-as any self-respecting waitress would rebel against such conspicuous presumption on the part of her employer n prolly tell him to stick it where the sun don't shine.. the quasi-urbane scrivener is more likely to express his ire in a more finely minced set of phraseologies.

It is at this moment that we hear Bartleby's singular indulgence in the metaphysics of language, a remark which echoes over and over in the life of the story, and carries him from legitimate, stable employment, into a vortex of entropy which consumes every last fiber of his being. (not to mention the fact that I am, here-in, extending the life of his magical incantation beyond the end of Melvilles story and on into yet another tale entirely.)

HIS BOLD DEMUR STRUCK ME INSTANTANEOUSLY AS A KIND OF "SHAWN WALLACE EUPHAMISM"- ARTICULATED IN THE FRIGIDLY CIVIL JARGON OF VICTORIANA.

"I PREFER NOT TO"

This signature phrase becomes the key to this story of a man UNDOING HIMSELF by assuming a submissive relationship to his own will. And, in my warped mind, it simultaneously explained and created the

possibility that, in reality , an actual humane being might exist inside the apparent, existential options, which define the walls of a very specific psychic garden .
(insert cliché)

By merely extrapolating a hypothetical situation, populated n fully fleshed with features of pedestrian reality, Herman Melville takes this one declaration of individual choice and permutes it so relentlessly that we are eventually forced to see Bartleby "prefer not to" exist.

Likewise I was forced to observe this very peculiar young man, who had become Divine Umbertos right hand, "prefer not to" acknowledge or recognize ANYTHING beyond his own willful "sabotage" of Art or culture or humane communion or any of them thangs I felt was intrinsic to the nature of the Beatnik League.

Having endured the queer preferences and prejudice expressed in Shawn's excruciating, Victorian priggishness and stilted language, I was shocked and amazed by the example presented by Melville. And, at the same time, reduced to a puddle of exquisitely bemused jello by the fact that "I prefer not to" seemed to be a perfect example of the unbelievable n hilarious diffidence with which Shawn attempts to disguise his own humane frailty.

As the nineties dawned on Richmond street, AS220 was overrun by Shawn and his assorted and dubiously decreed URI class of 92 playmates. AND LO! There came into vogue a ludicrous, mutant form of Victorian etiquette, married, in the squalid intellectual vacuum of Umberto's Jive Miasma, to a kind of fifth generation punk obliviousness. This

bizarre attitude fused repression and denial into a post-mod manifestation of ignorance and bliss that yielded adult children who were part enfant terrible, part teen bureaucrat, and frighteningly (but politely) self-defeating and psychically unreeled.

In Shawns case, granted a large measure of authority and license by divine Umberto, the result was a numbing, tautological hierarchy of pretense-characterized by a vacant, self abnegating willfulness- quite indistinguishable in the person of Mr Wallace from the cautionary "preferences" of Melvilles mythological scrivener.

Now that I've watched a few of these tormented neophytes turn themselves inside out and emerge as absolutely astounding, gifted n remarkable humane beans, it seems even more a miracle combine of intellectual hybrid vigor and psychic birth trauma. But Im more than willing to consider that Bartlebys Hypothetical undoing of himself, seen through the veil of Melville's imaginary failure as an artist, might be merely the expression of a panic stricken phase in the individuation of another self-invented artistical persona , a century later.

IT'S A BOY!

CAFE SOCIETY QUESTIONNAIRE **SHAWN WALLACE**

WHAT ASPECT OF THE CURRENT AS220 ARE YOU MOST PLEASED WITH?

WHAT ASPECT OF THE AS220 OF EARLIER YEARS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE REVIVED?

YOU DO SO MANY THINGS OFFICIALLY AND UNOFFICIALLY AT AS220
WHAT PROJECT ARE YOU FOCUSED ON RIGHT NOW ABOVE ALL THE OTHERS?

AS FUNDRAISING BECOMES EVERMORE URGENT AND INCESSANT
AT AS220 THE RHETORIC ON EMPIRE STREET HAS BECOME
INCREASINGLY POLITE, COURTLY AND POLITICALLY CORRECT. DO YOU
THINK THIS RHETORIC HAS ANY EFFECT ON THE ARTISTS WORKING AT
AS220?

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEALS CONCERNING HUMAN INTERACTION?

IS MAINTAINING DECORUM AND POLITESS MORE IMPORTANT THAN
HONESTY AND DIRECT "CONFRONTATIONAL" INTERACTION?

ALAN GINSBERG ONCE SAID THAT THE ESSENCE OF POLITESS IS ARROGANCE.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?

IS THERE A TIME AND A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING?

Julie

